

FIRST STEP TO SUCCESS



AT THE DOUBLE DECKER BILINGUAL PRESCHOOL, EDUCATING THE WHOLE CHILD MAKES THE MOST OF UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING

'IF YOU CAN GIVE CHILDREN A STRONG SENSE OF SELF WHILE IMPARTING A JOY FOR LEARNING, YOU ARE LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR FUTURE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS.'

DOUBLE DECKER IS A MULTICULTURAL BILINGUAL PRESCHOOL AND ACCREDITED KINDERGARTEN FOR CHILDREN AGED TWO TO SIX.

Based across two sites near the cosmopolitan city of Zurich, Double Decker caters to Swiss families seeking a multicultural environment for their children, as well as international families wishing to integrate with the local community. Zurich's international character provides an ideal setting for Double Decker, where children from 19 different cultures and linguistic backgrounds are represented.

Double Decker's nurturing approach to the English and German bilingual learning environment maximises the 'window of opportunity' for assimilating languages that children under the age of seven possess. Research shows that bilingual children typically find additional languages easier to learn. Studies also suggest that bilingualism enhances cognitive development and links to parts of the brain responsible for mathematics, music and other disciplines.

'At Double Decker we focus on educating the whole child,' says School Director Nava Bader. 'It's during the foundation years that the future adult is developed. If you can give children a strong sense of self while imparting a joy for learning, you are laying the groundwork for future educational success.'

MOTHER-TONGUE TEACHERS

The school only employs mother-tongue English and German speakers, and each group of children is supervised by a native English speaker and a native German speaker. During the school day, teachers only speak their mother tongue to minimise confusion, particularly since many children speak third or even fourth languages at home.

Double Decker's commitment to one teacher, one language is applied to the half-hour 'morning circle' that begins each day. 'Morning circles reflect learning themes,' explains

Curriculum Co-ordinator Andrea Bader Rusch. 'One week, we explore and strengthen the theme in German. The following week, we repeat exactly the same theme in English.'

A high ratio of staff to children guarantees a minimum of two teachers to a maximum of 14 children. This intimate atmosphere means that teachers can deliver individual support, conduct accurate, continuous assessment and plan creatively to meet the needs of all their children. In addition, close teacher-parent-child relationships promote the provision of the learning environment 'scaffolding' that ensures a child is both properly supported and sufficiently challenged. Again, the focus is on the whole child, and on making sure he or she has the best educational start.

BEST OUTCOMES

The maintenance of a successful bilingual learning environment requires loyal, dedicated staff who are in touch with the latest thinking in child development. At Double Decker, training is continuous, as staff work with experts to determine how respected scientific and educational developments can be applied in practice to ensure the best outcomes for the children.

'Not only do we engage the expertise of a leading authority in the field of multilingual education, we also work with a medical doctor/neuroscientist who facilitates Double Decker's ongoing training programme with emphasis on the critical elements of early neural development,' says Andrea.

Underpinning everything at Double Decker is the close-knit relationship between administrators, staff, children and parents, which encourages transparency and paves the way for a smooth transition to the variety of local public and private schools.

Nava sums up the Double Decker ethos: 'We offer children the nurturing and support that are essential for creating an environment where learning is fun. Here, each individual is inspired to take the next steps on his or her educational journey.'